

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday****Help reestablish our urban forest by planting a tree for Arbor Day**

Arbor Day is a nationally-celebrated observance that encourages tree planting and care. In Florida, Arbor Day is always celebrated on the third Friday in January. This year Arbor Day is January 19, 2007.

The idea for Arbor Day originally came from Nebraska. A visit to Nebraska today wouldn't disclose that the state was once a treeless plain. Yet it was the lack of trees there that led to the founding of Arbor Day in the 1800s.

Trees enhance the beauty of the landscape and make towns, parks, streets, businesses and homes more inviting. They add a natural character to our neighborhoods that gives a feeling of well-being. In addition, trees provide a multitude of other benefits that may not be so readily apparent.

Trees are natural filters of air and groundwater. They can remove carbon dioxide and pollutants from the environment. Carbon dioxide is one of the so-called greenhouse gases implicated in climactic change. Research has shown that neighborhoods that are planted in trees are less dusty than similar neighborhoods without trees. While absorbing carbon dioxide, trees release oxygen into the air.

Trees can help reduce cooling and heating bills. Properly placed trees help conserve energy by shading and cooling buildings in the summer and by blocking cold winds in the winter. Trees can also increase or decrease the amount of wind reaching a building if planted in the right location.

Tree roots hold soil in place and prevent erosion. Trees assist in storm water control. Leaves and branches slow falling rain allowing it to soak slowly into the ground, reducing the amount of run-off and helping to recharge the aquifer.

Some trees provide food for us. People plant trees, like pear and fig, around their homes for the visual appeal as well as for the fruit they provide. Trees also provide valuable shelter and food for many birds and animals.

In addition to their practical value, trees have aesthetic value. They add a variety of colors, shapes, textures and patterns to the landscape. Properly placed trees have a welcoming effect, provide privacy and act as ceilings for outdoor areas. Research has shown that environments well planted with trees have a healing and soothing effect compared to scenes without plants.

Important to homeowners is the fact that the property value of landscaped homes is five to twenty percent higher than that of non landscaped homes. In addition, while living there you will receive all the other benefits that trees have to offer.

When choosing new trees, select high quality trees that are wind resistant and adapted to our growing conditions. Be sure to plant it correctly and maintain it properly to ensure many years of enjoyment. For more information, contact your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or visit www.solutionsforyourlife.com.

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The hurricanes and tropical storms of 2004 and 2005 destroyed approximately twenty five percent of our urban forest in Northwest Florida. Help reestablish our tree canopy by celebrating Arbor Day. Plant a tree. It is an act of optimism and kindness, a labor of love and a commitment to stewardship.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>